

Excerpt of G.O.P. Debate Involving Bush on Iran Arms

Special to The New York Times

DES MOINES, Jan. 9 — Following is an excerpt of the Republican Presidential debate Friday last night, as recorded by The New York Times. It involves questions by the moderator, James Gannon, editor of The Des Moines Register, and responses by Vice President Bush.

Q. Mr. Bush, you've been Vice President for seven years. But it is hard to assess your role in the Reagan Administration, what your judgement was on key issues and what role you played in shaping policy. You've refused to give a full explanation of your role in the sale of arms to Iran and the diversion of money to the contras. You seem to be telling the American people, in effect, 'Trust me; I did the right thing, but I can't tell you what I did.' How can you expect their trust if you won't tell them plainly what you thought, what you said, what you did at that time on those key issues?

A. Jim, contrary to the hypothesis of your question, I have answered every question put to me save one. And the one question is what did you tell the President of the United States and I shouldn't do that. Al didn't go out talking about what he told the President at the depths of Watergate. Bob didn't do it when he was national chairman. I didn't do it and I'm not going to.

You've got a problem: the confidentiality between the President and the Vice President that should remain solid. Now I've answered every question. Now what I'd like to do tonight, since your paper had a full page on this suggesting that I didn't answer the question about diversion, is to ask you now to ask each one of these who has been shooting at me to ask the question and let me answer it, save the one.

Funds for the Contras

You asked about diversion. I didn't know about diversion of funds to the contras. The Congress had an 8- to 10-million-dollar hearing. They never suggested that I did. The Tower report said that I didn't. And you, your paper today, had that question raised as if I hadn't answered it. And I resent it frankly. And I think you owe me now, you owe it to me to ask me the question that I haven't answered. You owe me in fairness. All Right ask me the question.

Q. I want to ask you the question I haven't heard you answer. George Shultz went to Congress and said what he told the President and said, 'Mr. President, this is a bad policy; we shouldn't do it.' Cap Weinberger told the Congress that. They are n't disloyal to the Administration. Why can't you?

A. Told the Congress what?

Q. Told the Congress that they told the President this was a bad policy and they were opposed to it.

A. I supported the policy. I stood, as Poindexter said, solidly for the policy and the policy was: We've got to do better. We've got to look over the the horizon to see if there isn't something that we can deal with in the interest of the Persian Gulf, in the interest of U.S.-Iran relations. Something better than dealing with this madman Ayatollah Khomeini.

And the other part of it is, and here is where I probably erred, Jim. We were concerned. I headed the C.I.A. We got reports that Mr. Buckley, now admitted as the C.I.A. station chief, was being tortured. The President and the Vice President, certainly the President, bear the burden of that more than anybody else. If we erred, and I think we did in retrospect, looking back, a deal that wasn't supposed to be arms for hostages proved to be that. But if we erred, we erred on the side of trying to free Americans that are held by terrorists.

Arms for the Hostages

And, yes, I'm sorry that things didn't work out right. That it was proved later to be arms for hostages. That the President was presented a deal that wasn't arms for hostage. He made a tough choice. He had some concerns about it. I had some concerns about it. They have been recorded and I don't think it is very fair to say I have refused to respond to questions.

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